

## Counseling Women and Leadership in Higher Education its Unique Role and Challenges in Promoting Women's Empowerment and Development in South-South Nigeria

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### Abstract

Leadership is a key ingredient in the ultimate success or failure of any institution be it public or private. This article examined a critical review of counseling women and leadership in higher education, its unique role and challenges in promoting women's empowerment and development in south-south Nigeria. Included in this discussion are a description of how leadership in colleges and universities has evolved, the characteristics that are unique to higher education together with the counseling implications for effective leadership, and consideration of the immense challenges women face as they attempt to keep higher education responsive to the needs of business and industry.

### Keywords:

Counseling, Women and leadership, Higher education, Unique role empowerment and development.

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### **Background to the Study**

Growing body of evidence demonstrates the importance of gender balance in leadership including improvements in organisational performance and corporate governance. However women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles whether in business, academia or public life, despite forming over 42 per cent of the Nigeria workforce. This lack of women in leadership is particularly acute in the higher institutions Kouzes and Posner, (2002, p 212.) opined that in 2015, women accounted for only 19.8 per cent of the workforce in Nigeria. However, even where they are successful in increasing female recruitment, they do not see this translating over time into significantly more women leaders.

Leaders, regardless of whether they are in the corporate world or higher education, face a myriad of challenges that would have been inconceivable in a previous era. In fact, there are probably as many definitions of leadership as there have been individuals who have studied the concept (Yukl, 2004). According to this theory, successful leaders were those who tended to adapt their approach to a situation according to its unique circumstances. In other words, actions or behaviours that might be considered appropriate in one environment could have limited effectiveness in another setting, given the different conditions prevailing in the alternative situation. Many of the earliest inquiries into the nature of leadership centred around the notion that some individuals seem to be born with characteristics and traits which enable them to lead better than others (Yukl, 2004). Until about the middle of the last century, most research into leadership was concerned with identifying the unique attributes of individuals who were considered to be effective leaders (Brown, 2007). An individual's intelligence, personality and physical appearance, for example, were seen as characteristics that had a direct impact on leadership potential and ability. As Bennis and Nanus (2005, p 5) observed, the ability to lead was '... vested in a very limited number of people whose destiny made them leaders. Those of the right stuff could lead; all others must be led.' Ultimately, though, it became clear that the identification of specific traits and characteristics common to all successful leaders was virtually impossible (Yukl, 2004).

### **Unique Fundamental Leadership Practice of Women in Higher Education**

Obviously women play a vital role in the society in terms of leadership role and empowerment. Although, most societies see them as second class citizens which their uniqueness is highlighted as follows. The first fundamental leadership practice is to 'challenge the process' which implies that successful leaders are willing to take calculated risks (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). Effective women leaders also encourage and motivate their followers by providing challenges that constitute opportunities for personal growth and development. They view a failed attempt as a learning opportunity. The second fundamental leadership practice is to 'inspire a shared vision', and this denotes the importance of precipitating a collective commitment to the future of the organization (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). Effective women leaders help their followers connect to, and become supportive of, a common mission. 'Enable others to act.

The third fundamental leadership practice refers to the importance of empowering followers in order to nurture true collaboration (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). Successful women leaders develop trusting and participatory relationships which inherently involve and value everyone in the organization (Goldring and Greenfield, 2002). 'Without constituents to enlist, a

prospective leader is all alone, taking no one anywhere. Without women leaders, constituents have no energizer to ignite their passions, no followers, no compass by which to be guided.

The fourth fundamental leadership practice, 'model the way', means that successful women leaders consistently and conscientiously project an appropriate example for their followers (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). For example, leaders tend to model effective leadership when they are seen as dealing with complex issues in a thoughtful and incremental manner. Furthermore, the values of the leader must be consistent with those of their followers. 'Leaders who advocate values that aren't representative of the collective won't be able to mobilize people to act as one.' (Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p 212.)

### **Way of Promoting Women Empowerment and Development in South-South Nigeria**

This paper provides few ways of promoting women empowerment and development In South-South Nigeria an introduction to the issue of women's participation as leaders in higher education It would be misleading to construct women as victims in all-powerful patriarchal organisations of knowledge production. Women are entering leadership positions and are being creative and innovative (Bagilhole and White, 2011). There have been positive interventions for change in diverse national locations. Attribution is always a challenge when evaluating the effect of policy interventions (Saunders, 2010). Socio-economic forces, as well as specific policy interventions, contribute to changing patterns in women's participation in leadership. Thinking about women in organisations has focussed on three areas - fix the women, fix the organisation and fix the knowledge (Schiebinger, 2009).

1. Fix the women- enhancing women's confidence and self-esteem, empowerment, capacity- building, encouraging women to be more competitive, assertive and risk-taking.
2. Fix the organisation- Gender Mainstreaming, Institutional Transformation *e.g.* gender equality policies, processes and practices, challenging discriminatory structures, gender impact assessments, audits and reviews, introducing work/life balance schemes including flexible working.
3. Fix the knowledge – identifying bias, curriculum change *e.g.* the introduction of gender as a category of analysis in all disciplines, gender and women's studies. Approaches that focus on one area *e.g.* fixing the women *without* addressing organisational cultures that reproduce inequality can be fundamentally flawed (De Vries, 2010). Gender and organisation scholars have argued that rather than seeing the women as requiring remedial support, it is the organisations that require transformational change (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

Eagly and Carli (2007) used the metaphor of the labyrinth to describe women's careers. Capacity development programmes to support women's career planning and development now exist in diverse national locations *higher* institutes are expected to provide leadership development opportunities for women to help build a solid stand form women in leadership role.

### **Challenges of Women and Leadership in Higher Education**

In many respects women and leadership in higher education can be characterized as being in the midst of an identity crisis. For most of its history academia has considered itself somewhat transcendent of the cultural, political and economic forces that influence and shape the rest of society and its institutions (Hughey, 2003). Since the middle of the last century, however, higher education has come to be viewed as more egalitarian than meritocratic this imply that, it has come to be seen as a right rather than a privilege. As an unintended consequence of this philosophical and perceptual shift, many now consider colleges and universities to be businesses, not unlike the other commercial concerns with which they are familiar. Maddux (2002, p 41) observes that this metamorphosis has contributed to a crisis in educational leadership of women Gmelch (2000, p 581) observed that around the world scholars and administrators alike speak about a great leadership crisis in higher education especially on the part of women who hardly are given part in the administration of most sensitive positions in higher education .. The search for solutions to the leadership dilemma leads us to thousands of leadership studies, most of which are contradictory and inconclusive.' Maddux (2002, p 42)

### **Conclusion**

Base on the study, It is important to keep in mind that there is no one 'right' way to conceptualize leadership or to become a leader. On a fundamental level, individuals are able to lead when they have people who are willing to follow. Jarvis (2009, p 581), in the International Dictionary of Adult and Continuing Education, defines leadership as 'the ability of a person to influence the actions, behaviour, beliefs and feelings of another person or persons and gain their cooperation and the ability to attract followers to the performance of a task'. Leadership can also be viewed, at least in many organizations, as a continuous struggle between competing values and unattractive options. Leadership has a lot to do with taking action confronting situations as they occur and dealing with them in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

At the same time, leadership sometimes involves taking a stand that may be unpopular with many followers. Certainly, effective leadership is essential if the obstacles to change are to be overcome. The environment in which academia operates is increasingly political, and the stakes economic and otherwise have never been women and leadership in a better position in higher education as well as for society at large. It is imperative that women leaders should be given the chance to emerge and confront the turbulent times that lie ahead so as to reinvent academia so that it retains its relevance in a world which desperately needs what higher education has to offer.

### **Recommendation**

The study recommend ways of improving women and leadership role in higher institution and it implication on counseling Kouzes and Posner, (2002) opine the following ways of improving women and leadership role in higher institution and it implication on counseling

1. Improve workplace culture to achieve a balance of women and men at all levels in tertiary institution, the most important factor is to develop a workplace culture that supports this aim. Organisations which promote gender balance are likely to appeal to, and benefit, men and women, staff and employer.

2. Manage talent: Effective talent management has been linked to improved employee engagement and business performance but gender equality considerations need to be embedded in your talent management processes if women and men are to have equal opportunities to progress.
3. Introduce effective mentoring: Mentoring can help your female staff develop the skills and confidence they need to take on more senior roles. It is not about teaching a particular skill set, but more about creating a reflective learning environment through conversations between mentor and mentee, that allow the mentee to explore issues and develop solutions
4. Highlight female role models: Research suggests that having a variety of role models is an effective way to develop the professional behaviours that enable people to progress successfully in their careers. Their goals are attainable, as well as being a source of learning.
5. Train women in leadership skills: Providing gender specific training in leadership skills for SET women provides real benefits. It gives a clear message that the organisation views them as leaders and is making an investment in them, boosting their confidence and self-esteem.
6. Encourage women onto public boards positions in public life can provide women with excellent leadership training at little cost. Public boards cover a wide range of responsibilities, giving appointees the opportunity to develop transferable leadership skills and attributes that benefit both them and their employers.

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